DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 448 CG 030 819

AUTHOR Park, Gilbert C.
TITLE Multiple Dimensions of Ethnic Persons: Listening to Korean American College Students.
PUB DATE 2001-04-00
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; Cultural Background; Higher Education; *Identification (Psychology); Interviews; *Korean Americans; Personal Narratives; *Self Concept; *Social Integration
IDENTIFIERS *National Identity

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the assumptions that a person's ethnic identity is equal to his/her national identity by looking at the stories of seven Korean American college students and their ethnic sense of self. It explores the lives and stories of these students as they refine what it means to be Korean American persons through social interactions with non-Korean American students as well as amongst themselves. These students used two labels to describe who they are, Korean American and Asian American. The label of Korean American had two very different meanings: Koreans in the United States and Americans with Korean heritage. Also, most of the participants felt that using a label to describe themselves was very limiting. Several participants used more than these two labels. This suggests that equating one's ethnic identity with national ancestry may not best explain the Korean American students' ethnic sense of self. Some students used the pan-ethnic label of Asian American. This challenges the primordial view on ethnic identity, since Asia is not their national origin. The findings suggest that the ethnic sense of selves for the Korean American students is multi-dimensional and dynamic. An ethnic person may identify the self by using different labels, and different social environments may highlight a different part of the ethnic sense of selves. (Contains 20 references.) (ADT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 451 448

MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF ETHNIC PERSONS:
Listening to Korean American college students

By Gilbert C. Park

815-F Eagle Heights
Madison, Wisconsin 53705

(608) 232-1716
gcpark@students.wisc.edu

Department of Educational Policy Studies
University of Wisconsin-Madison

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
G. PARK
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CG030819

2 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States. It is estimated that Asian Americans will reach ten million by the year 2000 (Cao & Novas, 1996). 8000,000 Korean Americans are included in this group according to the 1990 census, and it is estimated that this number will reach one and half million by 2000 (Leadership Education for Asian Pacific's, Inc. [LEAP], 1996). Although their numbers are growing, relatively little efforts have been taken by social scientists to learn about who Korean Americans are and what issues they face.

The question for this paper is "can ethnic identity be equated with national ancestry?" More specifically, I will examine the assumption that one's ethnic identity is equal to her or his national ancestry by looking at the Korean American college students' ethnic sense of selves. This paper is a part of a larger project that looks at the ethnic identification of Korean American college students. In this, I explored the lives and stories of seven Korean American students as they refine what it means to be Korean American persons through social interactions with non-Korean American students as well as amongst themselves.

In general, I learned that the Korean American students used two labels to describe who they are, Korean American and Asian American. Although some participants used the Korean American label to describe who they are, two very different meanings were attached to the label: Koreans in U.S. and Americans with Korean heritage. To complicate the matter, most of the participants felt that using a label to describe who they are was very limiting. Instead, several participants used more than these two labels. These findings seem to suggest that equating one's ethnic identity with national ancestry may not best explain the Korean American students' ethnic sense of

selves.

My understanding of the Korean American college students' ethnic identity is informed by two views on ethnicity: primordialism and instrumentalism. At the risk of oversimplification, primordialists view ethnic groups as cultural groups (Cornell 1988, Isaacs 1975, van den Berghe 1981). In his explanation of American Indian tribes, Stephen Cornell (1988:177-178) says that ethnic groups are "communities of culture, weaving in the course of years or generations web of sentiment, belief, worldview, and practice that in turn help to sustain the group." In this view, an ethnic group is a collection of individuals who share similar language, belief system, values, and other cultural aspects (van den Berghe 1981:80). Membership in an ethnic group is acquired through birth (Isaacs 1975). Harold Isaacs (1975: 39) explains that "he (a newborn baby) automatically acquires the relation of his family and his group and he becomes at once an acknowledge holder of ethnicity that his people hold." Thus, from this view, Korean American college students' ethnic sense of selves as Korean Americans is acquired upon their birth.

Another view on ethnicity that influenced my understanding of Korean American college students' ethnic sense of selves is instrumentalism. While the primordialists look at ethnic groups through the lens of culture, instrumentalists views ethnic groups as interest groups (Patterson 1975, Portes and Bach 1985, Glazer and Moynihan 1963, Cohen 1969, and Bell 1975). Abner Cohen (1969:4) explains "an ethnic group is an informal interest group whose members are distinct from the members of other groups within the same society in that they share a measure like kinship and religion, and can communicate among themselves as relatively easily." In other words, ethnic groups are

made up of individuals who share a degree of biological and cultural traits and collectively act in order to achieve a common goal. Daniel Bell (1973:45) explains that the common goal is usually "protecting or gaining their places and privileges." Hence, the membership in a cultural group is stressed because they see the benefits of its membership in pursuing their interest. In doing so, they put their ethnic identification to use (Glazer and Moynihan 1963: 301). This view on ethnic identity explains that ethnic identification is "a strategic choice by individuals who, in other circumstances, would choose other group memberships as a means of gaining some power and privilege (Bell, 1975:i71)."

Although these theories have shaped the issues of ethnicity in profound ways, some concerns were raised. Among those who raised concerns was Yen Le Espiritu (1992). Because of my interest in the issues of Asian American ethnic identity, I will limit my discussion to that of Espiritu's. For instance, Espiritu (1992:7-8) argues that national ancestry or origin is not necessary equivalent to ethnic identity. Both primordialists and instrumentalists assume the shared cultural traits to be the basis of one's ethnic identity. Going one step further, primordialistic view (Isaacs 1975) suggests that biological and cultural traits determine one's ethnic identity. Espiritu (1992:7) says that this approach "overlooks the internal diversity within an ethnic group." Their focus on kinship and culture leads them to equate national ancestry or origin of a person with ethnicity.

Equating ethnic identity to national ancestry is problematic because it ignores internal diversity along the lines of language or dialect, region, and other categories. For instance, the division of the Korean peninsula may shape Korean Americans from South

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Korea to see themselves quite differently from North Korea. Also, linguistic differences between eastern and western South Korea may situate these Korean Americans to not see themselves as one group. To add to the complexity, recent studies (Espiritu, 1984; Lee, 1996; Min, 1996; and Tuan, 1998) acknowledge pan-ethnic identity as a possible identification for people of color while maintaining strong ties to a more specific ethnic sense of selves. Ignoring these, they are lumped into one group according to primordialists. Instrumentalists, on the other hand, have a different view. Instrumentalists (Glazer and Moynihan 1975:9, Patterson 1975) explain that one's ties to an ethnic group may change to the circumstances of a given time, which dictates her or his best interest. In doing so, one can establish or discontinue her or his ties with an ethnic group; thereby, one's ethnic sense of self is not limited to that acquired through birth.

This paper will converse with primordial and instrumental perspectives of ethnicity as I explore the issues of ethnic identity for Korean American college students. As I look at some ways that the Korean American students identify themselves through these views, I hope to contribute to the literature on ethnicity. The data was gathered using ethnographic methods in combination with formal and casual interviews and participant observations in various settings. The site of the data collection was a large mid-western university. Situated in a midsize city that houses the state government, it is the second largest city in the state. The student, faculty, and staff of this university are predominantly European Americans, and there are a small number of people of color on campus. The participants said that many European American students on the campus told them that they were the first persons of color that they encountered. Like many other

large mid-western universities, this university has very small number of commuters. Most of the students live on campus in dorms or apartments. This provides an opportunity for interracial interactions on daily basis.

Korean American Identity: Korean or American?

The assumption that one's ethnic identity equals her or his national ancestry or origin may not fully explain the Korean American participants who attach very different meanings to the Korean American label. In this section, I will discuss two meanings that the students attached to the Korean American label. While these students have chosen the Korean American label to describe themselves, a group of students called themselves as "jaemi kyopo" meaning that they were Koreans living in America although they were American citizens. In doing so, their Korean heritage was considered to be of more importance than their Americanness. On the other hand, the other group of students felt that they were "Americans with Korean heritage." These students felt their national ancestry was an important part of who they were, but they stressed that they were "Americans."

Jaemi Kyopo: Koreans living in America

"Kyopo" is a Korean word that refers to ethnic Koreans living in other countries (Korean-English dictionary). For instance, ethnic Koreans living in Japan are kyopo as well as those who are living in the United States. To specify where these ethnic Koreans live, words like "jaemi" (living in the U.S.) and "jaeil" (living in Japan) are attached to the word Kyopo. For instance, ethnic Koreans in Japan are called "jaeil kyopo" to

indicate that they are living in Japan (jaeil) while ethnic Koreans in America are called "jaemi kyopo" to specify that they are in America (jaemi).

Debra and Karla are two of the participants who said they were kyopo when I asked them to think of a term that best described who they were. Their parents came to the United States in the early 1970's. Unlike their immigrant parents, they were both born and raised in a metropolitan area of the same state where the university is located. Debra was a nineteen-year-old woman (a sophomore at the university) when I first met her. She spent her first year of college at a smaller university in her hometown. She said she needed to stay there in order to help her parents run their small business. After a year, she decided to transfer to this university because her parents wanted her to. Although she lived away from home now, she went home every weekend to help at her parents' business.

Karla is Debra's older cousin, and she is a twenty-year-old junior at the same university. Karla left home right after high school to attend this university. She said that she came to the university because she always envisioned herself being here, and her brother has recently graduated from the same university. She studies Communication Arts, but is not certain of what she will do after graduation. At the time of the data collection, it was her third year away from home, and she goes home at least one night a week because her parents want her to.

Debra and Karla felt that being an ethnic Korean was an important part of their sense of selves. When I first met Debra, she was wearing clothing and accessories that were purchased in Korea. These were the popular styles in Korea at that time, but there were not many people with these styles on campus. Debra told me that she had a lot of

fun last summer when she spent time taking classes at a university in Seoul. It was the first time she spent a whole summer in Korea without her parents, and this gave her the opportunity to interact with Korean young people whom she had gotten to like very much. She said that she hoped to marry a Korean man with a lot of money sometime so she could live in Korea.

Karla doesn't dress in the latest fashion from Korea like Debra does. However, Karla was "up-to date" with the popular culture of Korea. When I visited her apartment one day, Karla was playing one of the latest music hits from Korea. Together with Debra, Karla could tell all the gossip of the entertainment world in Korea ranging from who was dating whom to who wass cheating on whom. Karla rented videotapes from a local Korean grocery store to watch Korean shows and movies that were broadcasted in Korea. Although she had some difficulties in formulating a complex sentence in Korean, she claimed to understand everything that was said in the show. Karla was planning on spending next summer in Korea to take Korean language classes and to meet other Korean young people as Debra did.

Although they both said that they were always proud of being Korean (Americans), it seems that their experiences on campus has strengthened their sense of selves as Korean Americans. Coming from predominantly white communities, these two women had minimal contacts with other Korean Americans of their age. The university campus, on the other hand, provided an opportunity for them to socialize with other Korean Americans who shared similar cultural values and language. University is more than academics. By removing young people from home, the network of friends becomes more salient while on campus than the family support. This network of friends that

Debra and Karla embraced was the social network of Korean American students. More specifically, it is the network of jaemi kyopos.

To be a jaemi kyopo, one needs to be well versed in the language and culture of the United States in addition to being an ethnic Korean. On a Sunday evening, I ran into Debra and Karla at a library. They were talking to another Korean American woman about a Korean American man who asked Debra to go to a movie with him. I asked her, "who is this guy?" Karla told me the name of this man, and I thought this person was an international student from Korea since he had a Korean name. Debra was quick to correct me by saying that this man is a kyopo from Chicago Some time later, she that he was born in Chicago (a native to this country) and spoke English without an accent. She summarized him by saying, "he was born here [in the U.S.] like me." Karla later told me that Debra really liked the way this kyopo man dressed. She said that he dressed in the popular style of Korea. When I was introduced to him the next day at the library, I noticed that he liked to mix Korean words into English sentences. Perhaps, this was the way for him to show his close identification with Korean culture; however, my data can not support this since he wasn't interviewed.

Using mastery of the English language, Debra was sorting out kyopo from non-kyopo. The mastery of the English language, shown in the ability to speak without an accent, tells Debra that one was born and raised in the United States. At the same time, one needed to demonstrate her or his close identification with the Korean culture. Seeing herself as a kyopo, Debra used herself as a model to which other Korean Americans were compared and contrasted when deciding on her or his Kyopo status. Karla also thought that a kyopo was someone who knew "how things are" in the U.S. However, a kyopo

does not have to be born in the U.S. She said that, "you could come [to the U.S.] when you are five years old and still pretty much be a kyopo." In doing so, Karla expands the definition of being a kyopo to include those who are not born in the U.S.

Americans with Korean heritage

While students who called themselves kyopo stressed their close identification with Korea, others like Jack and Romi more closely identified with America than Korea. Hence, they stressed that they were Americans instead of Koreans in America. Although they emphasized that they were Americans, they did not want to downplay their Korean heritage either. Hence, they explained that they were Americans with Korean heritage.

Romi was born in a small village in Korea and spent a few years in an orphanage in a nearby town until she was adopted by a Euro-American family. She says she is grateful towards her adopted parents who have been supporting her academic interest by sending her to a prestigious private high school and financing her college education. Romi does not remember much of the time she spent in Korea, and most of her childhood memories concern her life in the U.S. Growing up in a rural community in the same state as the university, Romi had very few opportunities to interact with other Korean American people until she came to this university.

The university played an important role in forming Romi's sense of self as an American with Korean heritage by providing instruction in Korean language and culture. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Romi made a new connection with Korean culture, language and people. In two Korean classes that she took at the university, she learned to read, speak, and write functionally in Korean. Also, she has gotten to know other Korean American students who welcomed her into the network of Korean American students on

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

campus. In the process, she became interested in finding out more about her roots in Korea.

After a year at this university, Romi saved up enough money to pay for the flight to Korea, and spent that summer taking classes at a university in Korea with some financial help from her adoptive parents. In Korea, Romi sought to get in touch with her biological parents without success. Romi chose not to discuss the process of searching for her biological parents for personal reasons, but she said that it was an eye opening experience. Since that time, she has gotten involved with Korean American student organizations on campus and surrounds herself with other Korean American students. By the time of the data collection, she was more comfortable with speaking Korean than many other participants. In fact, Romi was one of two participants who spoke Korean during the interview.

Romi says that she is a Korean American because she was raised in America but was born in Korea.

GP Is there a label that best describes who you are? What would you call yourself?

Romi What do you mean?

GP I feel that the label Korean American would best describe who I am. Is there a label like that you would use?

Romi Well, I guess I can also use that call myself. I mean I would call myself Korean American, too.

GP Can you tell me what does "Korean American" mean to you?

Romi Korean American to me is an American person who is from Korea. Like I am an American in many ways. My [adopted] parents are American, my [adopted] brothers and sisters are Americans, and I am an American just as much as they are. Although I am not white like they are, I feel very ,very American. But, at the same time, I feel Korean.

GP Can you tell me more about feeling Korean?

Romi You know, my biological parents are Korean. [a long pause] I don't remember what they look like or anything, but I know … . I mean the fact that I was born in Korea means something, you know? I feel that I was born as a Korean and raised as an American.

Romi's sense of self as a Korean American challenges the primordialists' understanding of ethnic identity. She does not see herself as a Korean American because she shares common culture with other Korean American students who were socialized into Korean American culture. During their upbringings, other Korean American students (like Debra, Karla, Jack and other participants) interacted with other Korean Americans on a regular basis (like at church or community gatherings). Through their interactions they learned culturally appropriate ways to behave and carry one-self. Also their Korean American parents have influenced their worldviews. (The process through which young members of a cultural group are socialized into their culture is well documented in other studies like Zhou & Bankston, 1996)

Romi, on the other hand, was raised in a completely different setting. She was raised by non-Korean American parents who instilled their mainstream American worldviews in her. Also, she had very few chances to interact with other Korean

American people while growing up. Briefly put, Romi was socialized into white middle class culture since the adoption and her cultural values have little in common with Korean American students like Debra. For instance, Debra calls Romi a "banana girl." Debra (Romi's roommate) explains that Romi looks like a Korean person outwardly but she thinks and acts like a "white" person.

Debra calls Romi a "white" person because Romi has violated what Debra calls "Korean American-ness." Romi has met a man recently, and she slept with him. In fact, Romi had her friend stay at the apartment that she shares with Debra and Karla for a whole weekend. Debra felt that a Korean American girl would never do such a thing. She says that only white girls would sleep with a man whom one has met one or two weeks ago and has him stay over for a whole weekend. In other words, there seems to be a conflict in cultural values between Romi and Debra (also with Karla). Romi says that the incident was no big deal and says that Debra and Karla are too "naïve," and they must grow up! On the other hand, Debra and Karla felt that it was not an acceptable behavior for a Korean American girl. Despite the fact that Romi does not seem to share Korean American cultural values, she has chosen to identify herself as a Korean American person. Hence, Instrumentalists may better explain Romi ethnic sense of self. Romi's ethnic identity as a Korean American person seems to be a matter of choice that is motivated by her interests in finding out about her Korean roots.

Jack is another person who called himself a Korean American. Jack is from a midsize city that's racially diverse but segregated. His parents run a flea market that sells everything from nail clippers to tricycles. When I visited him there on a very hot summer day, Jack was working at his parents' store with his brother. Jack and his brother have

worked for their parents since they were in grammar school. Now that Jack is in college, he only helps out during summer break and his brother who works at an office, works only on weekends. Like other small Korean American businesses around the country (including Debra's family), their business caters to African Americans, Latino/as, and working class whites. Jack does not get paid for the hours he puts in at his parents', but he feels that he is obligated to volunteer since it is their livelihood that puts bread on the table and pays his tuition at the university.

On campus, Jack is not easy to spot in the crowd. With his baseball hat pushed down, Jack walked around the campus hurriedly from one class to another. Jack often socialized at the local karaoke bar where he spent at least one Friday night a month. This bar was known among Korean American students on campus as a place to meet other Korean American students. On Fridays and Saturdays, especially, Korean American students "hung-out" there. At the time of the data collection, the president of the Korean American Student Club (KSC) was a bartender there. Also, the fact that they had a large volume of Korean songs available for the students to sing attracts many of them. Jack and his friends would take turns buying a pitcher of beer for one another. Filled with smoke, loud music, and constant laughs, this bar resembled any other bar around campus. The only difference is that the majority of the patrons are Asian Americans, most of whom were Korean Americans.

Jack says that he is both Korean and American because he is an American from Korea.

GP What would you call yourself?

Jack I'm a Korean American.

GP What do you mean by that? Can you explain what that means to you?

Jack Well, I mean … I am an American and also Korean. No, that didn't sound right. I mean I am an American from Korea, you know what I mean? I was born here, I live here, and I haven't been there (Korea). So I am an American. But because my parents were born in Korea, they speak Korean, they cook Korean food, and … you know? Like I eat Kimchi [a traditional Korean side dish that is served with every meal] and all other Korean food, and I really enjoy them. Like its part of me. I am an American but Korean parts of me are very real, you know?

Although Jack was born here and had never been to Korea, he feels that he is from Korea because his parents were born there. Jack feels that his Koreanness is inherited from his parents who speak Korean to him and prepare Korean food for him. In fact he feels that these cultural traits of his parents are an important part of who he is. Because of his cultural background, he feels that he can not be just an American. This seems to support the primordialistic understanding of ethnic identity.

To summarize, these students' use of the Korean American label suggests that primordial understandings of ethnic identity, which equates ethnic identity with national ancestry, may be too simplistic. Those who identified themselves as Korean American attached very different meanings to the "Korean American" label as their ethnic sense of selves. For instance, Debra and Karla's understanding of the label meant that they are Koreans living in the United States. On the other hand, Jack and Romi saw themselves as Americans with Korean heritage.

Asian American Identity

In addition to two distinct meanings that are associated with Korean American label, primordialistic understanding of ethnic identity as national origin or ancestry falls short in explaining some Korean American students who choose to label themselves pan-ethnically. In this section of the paper, I will look at Byungu and Mary who chose to use a pan-ethnic label, Asian American, to describe themselves.

Byungu was born in Korea, but came to the United States before he turned ten years old. Unlike other participants, Byungu grew up in L.A.'s Koreatown. Byungu's family operates a small business that caters to other racial minorities (mostly African Americans and Latino/as). Like Jack, Byungu goes back home every summer to help out at his family's business. Also, Byungu is the only participant who is fully bilingual in that he is fluent in both written and spoken Korean and English. In addition to language, Byungu is well mannered in Korean tradition. For instance, he was the only one who called me "hyung [it can be roughly translated into 'older brother']" instead of calling me by my name. In the Korean culture, it is considered to be rude to address an older person by one's name. Older people can be addressed to by using a number of titles that are age and gender specific. I am called "hyung" by him since I am a man who is only a few of years older than he is.

Although Byungu's knowledge about Korea is better than any other participant, he stresses that he is an Asian American.

GP: Is there a term that best describes who you are? For instance, I would call myself a Korean American.

Byungu: I am a Korean American, too. I am a Korean because my parents are Koreans. Also I am an American because [pause] I became an American [citizen] after I turned 18 years old. But I think *it would be more appropriate to say that I am an "Asian American."* [I, GP, have changed font to stress the point]

Unlike other participants who were born in the U.S. or adopted by American families, Byungu was born in Korea as a Korean citizen. Once in the U.S., his sense of self as a Korean seemed to change as he attended public schools where he swore allegiance to the flag of the United States. He says, "it just didn't make sense. I was pledging my allegiance to the U.S., but I had a green card with a Korean passport." Byungu felt American, and it made sense for him to be naturalized as an American citizen when he got older. He has chosen to be an American.

GP Can you tell me a little more about being an Asian American?

Byungu I think that in order for Asian Americans to be fully accepted I use the word accepted in terms of political and social status, Asian Americans should come together and really work together to make a difference. On this campus, I am a member of Asian American Together. I joined the group because of my ongoing frustration about the level of diversity [on this campus]. There are only a handful of Asian Americans on this campus, and I think that means something. And in order for a minority like us [Asian Americans] to receive equal treatment, equal political power and status, we [Asian Americans] have to come together.

Byungu's sense of self as an Asian American is more in line with instrumentalists. The reason for him to identify as an Asian American is politically motivated. He felt that Asian Americans do not enjoy political power and social status within the mainstream. In order to fight this, he says that he should align himself with other Asian Americans. Some time later, Byungu told me that there is a reason for such a low number of Asian American students on campus. The reason, he argues, is that the university does not actively seek to recruit Asian American students. In fact, there was a half time recruiter for Asian Americans on campus while there were full time recruiters targeting African Americans, Latino/as, and American Indians. He felt that this was an example of the university's bias against Asian Americans.

Byungu felt that he could make a difference about the low number of Asian American students on campus by joining with other Asian American students. Hence, he has gotten involved with Asian American Together (AAT). He spends a lot of time at the organization's office, which is located at the multicultural center on campus. When I visited the organization's office, Byungu was in a meeting with Asian American student leaders to put together a packet that went out to high schools. The packet included flyers about AAT and it was an attempt to recruit more Asian American high school students to the campus.

Midwestern University enjoys a reputation as a liberal institution. It has a long history of student activism and protests that often clashed with the administration as well as the state and the federal policies. Being a student activist, Byungu is well connected with the leaders of student organizations. Also, Byungu's political motivation seemed to have been influenced by his studies in Political Science. As a Political Science major,

Byungu read many scholarly articles and books on social and political movements. Informed and empowered by these, Byungu became one of the leaders of AAT (Asian Americans Together). Byungu's sense of self as an Asian American, a pan-ethnic identity, was a political choice. This choice was a response to what he saw as racism on campus.

Mary is also an adoptee from Korea. The Euro-American family that adopted Mary is economically comfortable and her parents are well educated. In fact, Mary's adopted mother teaches at a local college and her adopted father is a jeweler. She has three other siblings, two of whom were also adopted from Asia. She grew up in a small town where she and her two other siblings were some of very few persons of color.

Unlike Romi, Mary was adopted shortly after she was born, and she learned later that she was born in the city of Pusan, the second largest city in Korea. Apart from where she was born, she has no recollection of her life in Korea. She showed bitterness toward her biological parents who gave her up for adoption. However, she told me that she would like to go back sometime to locate her biological mother and find out why she was adopted. Her adopted parents took her to annual picnics for Korean adoptees when she was younger, and those meetings were few occasions when she encountered other adoptees from Korea.

Mary's sense of self is unique from other participants. While others felt that their Korean heritage, whether biological or cultural, was an important part of who they were, Mary does not feel right about calling herself a Korean or Korean American. Instead, she uses a "generic" Asian American label to categorize who she is.

GP: Is there a term that best describes who you are?

MV: .No, I guess I just go along with the whole generic Asian American. I don't like to say I'm Korean American because I'm not. Well, I am Korean. But, for one, I don't even know [if my biological parents were Koreans]. There had been speculation that one of my parents could have been Japanese or a part Japanese or whatever. So don't even know what nationality they are. I know that I was born in Korea, and I look Korean. But I don't know any thing about the culture or anything. So I just kind of go along with I'm Asian American.

When asked how she calls her self, Mary stresses that she is not a Korean American. She explains her sense of self as non-Korean American using biological and cultural reasons. First, she can not be Korean because one of her parents might not be ethnic Korean. Also, she says she can not be Korean because she does not know Korean culture. This view is more in-line with the primordial view on ethnicity. In other words, one needs to have biological parents who are ethnic Koreans and possess some amount of knowledge about Korean culture. Mary, on the other hand, does not feel that she meets these conditions; hence, she does not see herself as a Korean American. Kyopo identified students like Debra and Karla would agree with Mary's definition of the Korean American label.

Instead of Korean American, Mary calls herself an Asian American. She is an Asian American because she knows she is an American but she "looks like an Asian or Korean (using Asian and Korean as a synonym) person." Similar to Romi, the other Korean adoptee in this study, Mary's sense of self as an Asian American could not be understood entirely through primordial or instrumental explanations of ethnicity. Mary's

sense of self as an Asian American is based on the fact that she shared physical similarities with other Asian Americans rather than sharing a common culture or pursuing similar interests.

It seems the assumption that ethnic identity equates to national ancestry or origin people does not account for the pan-ethnic identity where people of different national origins choose to identity as one. Byungu and Mary chose to identify themselves by using a pan-ethnic label, Asian American. This pan-ethnic label challenges primordial view on ethnic identity since Asia is not their national origin. On the other hand, instrumental view better explains the Byungu's pan-ethnic identity.

Multiple and Situational Ethnic Sense of Selves

In addition to the use of Korean American and Asian American labels, the Korean American students' multiple and situational ethnic sense of selves seem to challenge the idea that national ancestry equals ethnic identity. My findings suggest that the Korean American students' ethnic sense of selves is multi-dimensional and dynamic (Espirutu 1996).

Many social scientists of today would agree that ethnicity is socially constructed (Barth 1969, Epstein 1978, Lal 1990 and others). Ethnicity as a social construction implies that one's ethnic identity is not biologically nor culturally defined. Instead, it refers to the process of defining one ethnic sense of selves through social interactions with others. Related to the idea that ethnic identity is socially constructed is the idea that ethnic identity is situational. Different situations will highlight one or more ethnic identities of the person. In other words, a person's ethnic sense of self is not limited to a

cultural group that he or she is born into. In addition to having a choice, the choice does not have to be with only one group. Instead, the person can have multiple senses of selves at any given time.

This phenomenon was most obvious in Hyesun. I learned from talking to Hyesun that a person can have more than one ethnic identity. In fact, Hyesun has a number of identities.

GP Is there a label that you can use to describe yourself? Like I would call myself a Korean American.

Hyesun Well, let's see. [a pause] You mean, "*a*" label like one?

GP Whatever is good as long as you feel okay with them.

Hyesun Well, I guess Korean American is one. Also, an American is the other. I am an Asian American. I guess that's about it.

Hyesun feels that she is American, Korean American, and Asian American. All these labels have special meanings, and these are important to her. Put differently, Hyesun is an embodiment of numerous ethnic identities.

Hyesun was from the metropolitan area where Debra, Karla, and Jack are from. Although Hyesun was born in a different state, her family moved to this area when she was in fourth grade. Hyesun went to the same Korean church with Debra and Karla until she came to college. Going to the same church for years, Hyesun was a good friend of Debra and Karla, as well as their families. Although they went to the same church, all three of them went to different high schools since they lived some distance away from each other. Actually, each of them had to drive an hour or longer to go to that Korean church. Hyesun's father owns a computer firm. She said that she was from a traditional

Korean family with a gender division of labor. For instance, her father took care of earning money while her mother was in charge of running the family. Her father was very good at what he was doing and spent a lot of time away from home. So she spent much of her childhood with her mother.

It appears that her sense of self as a Korean American came from the special meaning she associates to the Korean language. In his controversial autobiography Hunger of Memory, Richard Rodriguez (1983) discussed his own association of home with parents' Spanish language. Hyesun also seems to equate home with Korean language. While Rodriguez (1993) felt that he had to pay the "high price" (giving up the fluency in Spanish to "make it" in middle class America through assimilation), she didn't seem to feel that she needs to pay this "high price" to make it. At any rate, Hyesun tells me that going home meant speaking Korean. To Hyesun, home was where Korean was spoken and being a Korean American was to speak Korean. Hence, the Korean American identity is an important part of who she is.

At the same time, her sense of self as an American is very real. After all she spent all of her life in America. Going through the public school system and living in a predominantly white area, most of her friends are European Americans who usually call themselves Americans. Hyesun had been socialized into American culture, and being an American is another important part of who she is.

To add to the complexity, Hyesun sees herself as an Asian American. Although her close friends include both Euro- and Asian Americans, she says that she is more comfortable being in the company of other Asian Americans. She feels more comfortable with other Asian Americans because she feels that there is a common

experience that she shares with them as Asian Americans in a predominantly white campus. Her association with Asian American friends on campus helped her to see herself as an Asian American. It is also an important part of who she is.

As discussed above, many participants mention more than one ethnic identity in describing who they were. For instance, Jack and Romi saw themselves as Americans and Koreans. Byungu saw himself as an American, an Asian American, and a Korean American. Mary saw herself as an American and an Asian American.

Adding to the multiple identities of Hyesun, she says that she would reveal a different part of her in different situations.

GP Can you tell me a little more about it? I mean, [a pause] let's say, a stranger would ask you where you're from. How would you respond to that stranger?

Hyesun I guess it depends on who's asking, you know? If a white person was to ask me, I guess I would say that I am an Asian American. But, sometimes I say that I am from Indiana. That's where I was born, you know. If an Asian [American] person asks me who I am, I would say I'm Korean. They can see that I'm an Asian, so obviously they want to know what nationality I am. So I would give it to him, I'm a Korean American. If a Korean person would ask me, I mean Koreans from Korea, I say to them that I'm a Korean American. Do you know what I mean?

She would reveal a different part of her depending on the ethnicity of an inquirer. From her experience, she learned that inquirers had a certain image of who she was before asking. She stressd to whites and Koreans that she was an American. Briefly put, since

ethnic identity is a social construction, a different situation (or social environment) calls for revealing a different part of her. Hence, ethnic identity is dynamic and situational.

The way that Byungu identified himself in different situations serves as an example of situational identity. While he is with other Asian American students (at AAT meetings for instance), Byungu stressed the need for Asian Americans to form a coalition to push the university into recruiting more Asian American students. In doing so, his sense of self as an Asian American was highlighted in the social environment with other Asian Americans. When he was in the company of some Korean Americans, Byungu prefered to speak in Korean instead. In doing so, Byungu's ethnic identity as a Korean American was revealed. At other times when he was in classrooms or other environments where there were not many Asian Americans, Byungu did not stress himself as an Asian American nor a Korean American. In doing so, Byungu was appealing to his American identity.

The discussion of Debra's and Karla's sense of selves as Kyopo seems linear and fits nicely into linear explanations of primordialists. After all, Debra and Karla did not use any other label but Jaemi Kyopo as the description of who they are. In fact, they laid down some criteria of what constitutes being jaemi kyopo, thereby, it functions to exclude some groups of people into the category. Also, it may be that their reference group was in Korea due to their recent trips to Korea. However, I think that their identification of kyopo may support the idea that ethnic identity is dynamic and situational.

In order to understand this, the social environment under which the interview took place must be noted. The interview took place at Debra and Karla's apartment where

only me, the interviewer, and them, the interviewees, were present. Also it must noted that Debra and Karla did not necessarily see me as a jaemi kyopo. I wasn't a kyopo since I was not born in the United States and my moral development took place in Korea. Debra says, "even though you came here [the U.S.] when you were in grade school, [you are not Kyopo because] Korean probably is your better language." Karla also felt that I was not Kyopo when she said, "You're a little more like a Korean from Korea." However, she granted me the status Kyopo not on the criteria that mentioned earlier but because "you are [the author was] pretty open to understanding kyopos and talking to other kyopos, too."

In other words, Debra and Karla might have interpreted the social environment of the interview in a way that they saw a need to define who they were against the interviewer whom they thought was not one of them. As a result, they may have overly stressed their sense of selves as kyopos over other identities they might have had. If this is true, the social environment influenced the presentation of their ethnic identity. This supports the argument that ethnic identity is dynamic and situational in nature. On the other hand, I haven't had the opportunity to observe them in other social environments where other parts of their ethnic identities would have been highlighted to further support this argument.

Summary

Thus far, I have discussed some ways that the Korean American students saw themselves ethnically. My data shows that the Korean American students' ethnic sense of selves did not necessarily equal their national ancestry or origin. First, those who

identified themselves as Korean American attached very different meanings to the Korean American label. For instance, Debra and Karla's understanding of the label meant that are Koreans living in the United States. On the other hand, Jack and Romi saw themselves as Americans with Korean heritage. Hence, it seems inaccurate to categorize them into one group just because they had the same national ancestry.

Secondly, some of the participants used pan-ethnic label to describe themselves. Byungu and Mary chose to identify themselves by using Asian American label. This pan-ethnic label challenges primordial view on ethnic identity since Asia is not their national origin. Lastly, my findings suggest the ethnic sense of selves for the Korean American students is multi-dimensional and dynamic. An ethnic person may identify the self by using different labels. Different social environments may highlight a different part of ethnic sense of selves.

REFERENCES

Barth, Fredrik. (1969). Ethnic groups and boundaries. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Bell, Daniel (1975). Ethnic identity. In N. Glazer & D. P. Moynihan (Eds.), Ethnicity: Theory and experiences (pp.141-176). Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press

Blauner, Robert. (1974). Racial oppression in America. New York: Harper& Row.

Buraway, Michael. (1991). The extended case method. In M. Buraway (Eds.), Ethnography unbound (pp. 271-287). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cohen, Abner. (1969). Custom and politics in urban Africa. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cornell, Stephen. (1988). The return of the native. New York: Oxford University Press.

Epstein, A.L. (1978). Ethos and identity: Three studies in ethnicity. London: Tavistock Publications.

Espiritu, Yen Le. (1992). Asian American panethnicity: Bridging institutions and identities. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Gibson, Margaret A. (1988). Accommodation without assimilation: Sihk immigrants in an American high school. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Glazer, Nathan & Moynihan, Daniel P. (Eds.). (1975). Ethnicity: Theory and experience. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Isaacs, Harold R. (1975). Idols of the tribe: Group identity and political change. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.

Lal, Barbara B. (1990). The romance of culture in an urban civilization. London: Routledge.

Patterson, Orlando. (1975). Context and choice in ethnic allegiance. In N. Glazer & D. P. Moynihan (Eds.), Ethnicity: Theory and experiences (pp.305-349). Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press.

Portes, Alejandro & Bach, Robert L. (1985). Latin journey: Cuban and Mexican immigrants in the United States. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.

Portes, Alejandro, (Eds.). (1996). The New Second Generation. New York : Russell Sage Foundation.

Rodriguez, Richard. (1983). Hunger of memory: the education of Richard Rodriguqez. New York: Bantam Books.

Shibutani, Tamotsu, & Kwan, Kian M. (1965). Ethnic Stratification: A Comparative Approach. New York: The MacMillan Company.

Yinger, Milton. (1985). Ethnicity. In Annual Review of Sociology II:151-180.

Zhou, Min & Bankston III, C. L. (1998). Growing up American: How Vietnamese children adapt to life in the United States. New York : Russell Sage Foundation.

Waters, Mary C. (1996-a). Ethnic and racial identities of second-generation black immigrants in New York City. In Portes, A. (Eds.). The New Second Generation. (pp. 171-197). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.